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Book Notes

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BOOK NOTES

By Archie P. McDonald

We continue to receive more books for review than can be accommodated in our regular review section, so we also continue this method of acknowledging the contributions of these interesting publications:

Christmas At The Ranch, by Elmer Kelton, with foreword by Walt McDonald and illustrations by H.C. Zachary (McWhiney Foundation Press, McMurry Station, Box 637, Abilene, TX 799697-0637, \$14.95) contains three essays that describe Kelton's childhood Christmases with his parents and siblings at the McElroy Ranch where his father worked as foreman, and the Hackamore N, operated by his grandfather; Kelton's "Best" Christmas, in 1944, between basic training at Fort Bliss and shipping out for service in the European Theatre; and a return to Kelton's wife's native Austria in 1981 for a memorable last Christmas with her family. You may be reading this in September, but Kelton's clear, Western-laced writing will be a nice Christmas present for you. Reading these memoirs, one easily can see why the Western Writers of America named Kelton their best writer, ever.

One might assume from the title that *Truman's Dilemma: Invasion or The Bomb*, by Paul D. Walker (Pelican Publishing Company, 1000 Burmaster St., Gretna, LA 70053), would involve the president's anguish, or at least his reasoning, for authorizing the first—and so far only—use of nuclear weapons in war. Actually, Truman's role in this story is minimal; mainly, Walker presents and defends the thesis that use of the bomb, once available, was the only real option available to President Truman. The majority of the text gives a history of Japanese culture, Japan's war making in the Pacific, its defense to the death of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, an explanation of the invasion plans known as Olympic (Kyushu) and Coronet (Honshu), and the development of the B-29 Flying fortress—the aircraft that delivered atomic bombs to Hiroshima and Nagasaki—and a short narrative on the Japanese response to the bombs. Of greatest interest to me is Walker's explanation of "Ketsu-Go," or the policy of organizing civilians, even children, for a desperate defense of the home islands. I have met one of those children, Daiji Gotoh, now a successful businessman headquartered in Miyazaki, who told me the same story. I regret the bomb and I regret war itself, but given the way things were, President Truman did the best he could for all concerned. Mr. Gotoh agrees.

Willie Earl Tindall told me about *Blood, Money & Power: How L.B.J. Killed J.F.K.*, by Barr McClellan (Hanover House, 163 Amsterdam Ave., New York, NY 10023 \$24.95) when we visited San Augustine to prepare the Spring meeting there. The book interested me immediately because I knew Ambassador Edward Clark from our days of service on the board of the Texas State Historical Association, and McClellan's thesis, said Willie Earl, was that Mr. Ed outright arranged Kennedy's death by assassination so Johnson could become president. I thought I knew Mr. Ed pretty well, that he was as close to Johnson as an any human being could be, probably had arranged the electoral

victory in 1948 involving the infamous Box 13—but never had I suspected what McClellan charged. And I still do not believe it. McClellan offers circumstantial evidence and implies a great deal more. For example, the assassination was caused by fears that Kennedy would drop Johnson from the Democratic ticket in 1964 because of his involvement with Billie Sol Estes and Bobby Baker, and both were embroiled in scandals. That would mean that Texas' interests, especially Big Oil interests, would lose their champion in Washington. So Clark recruited Mac Wallace, who recruited Lee Harvey Oswald, and was with Oswald on the Sixth Floor but left him to face the law alone, assuming he would die in a shootout with police. Enough. The controversy over the killing of Kennedy will never die, of course, but I remain unconvinced that Mr. Ed hired anyone to do this.

Writing JFK: Presidential Rhetoric and The Press in the Bay of Pigs Crisis, by Thomas W. Benson (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354), is additional evidence that the administration of President John F. Kennedy is still of interest to the scholarly community as well as conspiracy buffs. This is a scholarly examination of President Kennedy's press relations during a crisis judged his greatest failure of leadership. Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy's confidant, advisor, and speechwriter, is also a principal in this slender monograph. Benson evaluates Sorensen's role as having written what Kennedy would have written had he the time to do so. That bespeaks the greatest meeting of the minds of presidents and their advisors since Woodrow Wilson and Colonel Edward M. House.

The Defense of Vicksburg: A Louisiana Chronicle, by Allan C. Richard, Jr. and Mary Margaret Higginbotham Richard, with foreword by Terrence C. Winschel (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354), consists of a collection of letters, diaries, and reminiscences of Louisiana soldiers involved in the defense of Vicksburg, the principal obstacle that kept "the father of waters" from "flowing unvexed to the sea." In 1863, Union forces had no greater goal than to capture this Confederate stronghold, and Rebels no more important place to defend in the Western Theatre of the Civil War. Various preliminary sections discuss military activities and policy and sources of the writings, but the preponderance of the pages are devoted to the primary sources themselves. Notes and illustrations make valuable contributions to the effort.

The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 11, September 1864-May 1865, Lynda Lasswell Crist, editor, Barbara J. Rozeck, assistant editor, and Kenneth H. Williams, associate editor (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, LA, 70803, \$85), represented the longest running series ever reviewed by *ETHJ*. This project began late in the 1950s following one conversation between Bell Wiley and Frank Vandiver, top-level Civil War—especially Southern side—scholars, about the need for a comprehensive presentation of the papers of the Confederacy's only president. And another conversation between Vandiver and Cooper Ragan, prominent Houston attorney and enthusiast of Civil War studies—especially the Southern side. Result: the founding

of The Jefferson Davis Association, which began funding editorial work; the appointment of Vandiver to head the project; and affiliation with Rice University. Haskell Monroe edited the first volume, which appeared over three decades ago; James T. MacIntosh took over editing the volumes, and then Linda Crist assumed the post. Comes now Volume 11, with an introduction by Richard J. Sommers which tells the reader of Davis' activities during the nine months covered by the volume. Complete texts of documents of sufficient significance and a good deal of calendaring of others preserves the goal of comprehensive coverage of the extant papers of Jefferson Davis

A Republican friend in Georgia recently gifted me a book about "the other party." Let us consider *A National Party No More: The Conscience Of A Conservative Democrat*, by Zell Miller (Stroud & Hall Publishing, 225 Central Avenue, Suite 1608, Atlanta, GA 30303). Mr. Miller, former governor and holder of various offices in Georgia politics, including the US Senate by appointment, apparently thinks his party has no conscience so he is offering them his. Miller's conscience developed in the mountains of North Georgia, where he grew up and still lives, in the Marine Corps, and in the battles of life and politics in an earlier age. He remembers "Mr. Roosevelt"—that method of reference always identifies one of my contemporaries—and Harry Truman as just about the last real Democrats before its leaders sold the party to "The Groups," Miller's euphony for special interests, especially blacks, women, and welfare recipients. The NRA, on the other hand, is presented as a good, honored American institution. Mr. Miller assures the reader that he is a Democrat by birth (much of what he writes is autobiographical), then tells us for 200 pages that the Democratic Party into which he was born is no more. That is so. It has evolved. Now, admittedly, the party *does* pander to those interests because they still vote for its candidates. The same is true of other parties and their "Groups." I agree with much of the way Miller has described the Democratic Party; I do not agree that its salvation depends on adopting the principles of the Republican Party. There appears to be as much extremism in one party as the other. Where is the middle?

Finally, we received a copy of *The Scofield Letters*, by G. Griffin Brown (Darbie Publishing, 323 South Monroe St., Canton, MS 39046). The ninety-seven-page volume contains eight letters written by James and Henrietta Scofield after their relocation from Virginia to Texas in 1837. Schofield was a surveyor. The first of the eight letters was written in San Augustine. A brief introduction precedes a transcript of each letter, followed by a photograph of the original. This is followed by a thirty-page section containing family photographs. The letters provide insight into the trials of pioneering during the Republic of Texas.